MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Jackson Purchase Historical Society

Volume 18 | Number 1 Article 12

6-1990

Book Reviews: "Waiting for the Morning Train"; Et al.

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Walter Darrell Haden

Bruce Catton. *Waiting for the Morning Train: An American Boyhood.* Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press.

Some Americans may remember Bruce Catton, a journalist noted for his superb *A Stillness at Appomattox* and *Mr. Lincoln's Army.* Catton recalls here the years 1899-1916 in Northern Michigan, from his birth to his boarding the train for college.

While Benzonia, Michigan, was not the American South, a reader finds many similarities to Catton's experience. For instance, his small community was greatly influenced by the local churches as Southern places have been. The evangelistic emphasis in Michigan was perhaps more subdued than in the South, though. Yet, children would have engaged in many of the same activities in both locations, when there were too few boys to play team baseball, the youngsters organized to play "scrub." In fact, along with detailed rules, he indicates the most likely sources of arguments among players. Like other young boys, he played cowboys and Indians with an always loaded stock or finger. Older boys went "cooning" for watermelons. Of course, some owners doctored a few melons with croton, a very powerful laxative, to reward mischief-makers. Catton knew well the variety of Halloween pranks, too.

Perhaps other similarities exist between Benzonia and some Southern places. In both locales church colleges were formed only to become shortlived prep schools. Catton also saw much lumbering done around him, a practice that many Southerners have also witnessed. Perhaps different around Benzonia was the use of narrow gauge railroads for logging although portable sawmills operated in both the North and the South.

Several times Catton refers to Civil War battles, leaders, or soldiers. However, he does not specifically state what later is to inspire him to write about that great conflict. For most of Catton's early life, he possesses a reverence for those veterans in the Benzonia area. About 1916, his attitude changes in part from interest in the commercialized touring program of "Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock" to events of World War I that cause Americans to see war in a different light.

A reader should be assured there is rich personal material beyond the background of Chapter One.

Marvin L. Downing, Ph.D.

Gregory J. Macaluso. *The Fort Pillow Massacre: The Reasons Why.* New York, New York: Vantage Press, 1898. Pp. ix, 11f, appendix and bibliography, $11.95.

The capture of Fort Pillow on April 12, 1864, was one of the brilliant accomplishments of General Nathan Bedford Forrest. It was also one of the most sensational of his exploits. From that time forward, he would be charged with the massacre of Federal troops, especially of the black troops that were stationed at that location. That is the position that was taken by the Select Committee On the Conduct of the War which investigated the Fort Pillow affair. The historians Albert Castel, John Cimprich, and Robert C. Mainfort, Jr. also agree with the main conclusions of the Select Committee as does Gregory J. Macaluso in The *Fort Pillow Massacre: The Reasons Why.*

Macaluso has put forth several interesting points in his little book. First, he maintains that the fort was reoccupied by troops under the command of General Stephen A. Hurlbut, an action

that was in defiance of General William T. Sherman's orders. Second, the fort was of no strategic importance and should not have been reoccupied. Third, the real reason for the fort's reoccupation was so that Hurlbut and his accomplices could enrich themselves through plunder, i.e., by confiscating "goods, mules, and horses from the farmers in the area and only issue vouchers to those persons who could prove allegiance to the United States." Finally, there was a massacre at Fort Pillow.

What may be said about these contentions? Sherman did order the fort to be abandoned, and it was on January 18, 1864, so that the troops at that location could be sent on the Meridian, Mississippi, expendition, an action that was justified on the grounds of military necessity. The fort, however, was vacant for only a few days when it was once again occupied by Tennessee Unionist troops, the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry regiment, under the command of Major William F. Bradford. Bradford was in the process of recruiting his outfit to full strength. He was in command of Fort Pillow until early April when Major Lionel F. Booth, in command of black troops, arrived and assumed command. Hurlbut reoccupied the fort essentially for two reasons. He wanted to facilitate the recruitment of Bradford's regiment to full strength and to counter General Forrest who began a raid into West Tennessee and Western Kentucky in March 1864. Local district commanders such as General Hurlbut were allowed to make decisions such as cirmcumstances seemed to dictate. It may also be true, as Macaluso maintains, that Hurlbut expected to profit financially due to the reoccupation of Fort Pillow. However, it would seem that military necessity was the thought uppermost in Hurlbut's mind when he ordered the fort reoccupied because Fort Pillow did have some strategic value.

The "wholesale butchering of surrendering or otherwise routed troops was rare, yet this is just what seems to have happened to the Union garrison at Fort Pillow," a conclusion that this reviewer believes to be in error. It is true that Forrest and his men knew that Bradford's command had many Confederate deserters in its ranks as well as Tennessee Unionists and that most of Booth's men were runaway slaves. It is true that many of Bradford's men were recruited from the same Tennessee counties as were Forrest's men—that they knew each other. That there was hostility between the opposing forces is not in question. What is in question is whether there was a massacre. It should be noted that Forrest's men captured Colonel Isaac R. Hawkins and his command at Union City, Tennessee, on March 24, about three weeks prior to the capture of Fort Pillow. The men of the Seventh Tennessee Cavalry (C.S.A.) and Hawkins' Seventh Tennessee (U.S.A.) knew each other; there was great animosity between them, but Hawkins surrendered because of his experience with Forrest at Trenton, Tennessee, in December 1862, when he also surrendered to Forrest. This experience told Hawkins that Forrest was an honorable man—that his men would be treated as prisoners of war. Hawkins surrendered; there was no massacre, and his men were treated as prisoners of war.

It should also be noted that when Forrest made a raid into northern Alabama and middle Tennessee in the fall of 1864, he captured two or more garrisons that were made up of fifty percent or more of black troops. There was no massacre of these black troops or any other troops, and the Fort Pillow garrison would have been treated as prisoners of war had the garrison surrendered as Forrest demanded. Those that did surrender were treated as prisoners of war—168 whites and 58 blacks, unwounded, and they wound up in Confederate prisons.

According to the historian John L. Jordan, there were 398 survivors out of a garrison of 580 men. This means that a total of 182 men were killed, drowned or missing as a result of this engagement. When you consider the tactics that Forrest used in this battle and the fact that over 1000 Confederate troops, with overwhelming firepower, came over the walls of the fort and were firing at point-blank range, the wonder is why more of the defenders were not killed. Indeed, Forrest was able to capture Fort Pillow because of superior strength and tactics. It may be admitted that some Federal troops, as is true in most battles of this nature, may have been killed while trying to surrender. However, there was no "massacre" of large numbers of troops who were unresisting and defenseless.

Macaluso's *The Fort Pillow Massacre: The Reasons Why* is an interesting book, one that does have elements of truth in it. It does put forth ideas that some historians and students of the Civil War will find believable. In many ways, however, this small, unfootnoted volume reminds me of the many theories that have been put forth concerning Abraham Lincoln's assassination--the Davis and Stanton theses, for example. They make interesting reading, but they are nevertheless false. This is also largely true of Macaluso's book. However, this book is part of the growing literature on the Fort Pillow affair and as such it deserves to be read by students of the Civil War.

Lonnie E. Maness, Ph.D.

Hans L. Trefousse. *Andrew Johnson: A Biography.* New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 1989. Pp. 463, $25.00.

Of all the Presidents of the United States, Andrew Johnson is unique. He was born in abject poverty, did not attend school a single day, was the only President to be impeached, and was reelected to the United States Senate six years after leaving the Presidency. There is, however, an enigma about Johnson that has never been fully resolved. How was it possible for a statesman who rose from the depths of poverty to become mayor of Greeneville, to governor and senator, a political leader that was seldom defeated in 1840s and 1850s, a general who ruled Tennessee with an iron hand while serving as military governor, could seemingly be so inept as President of the United States. Hans L. Trefousse, in *Andrew Johnson: A Biography,* attempts to answer these questions.

Johnson's political career, beginning as alderman of Greeneville and ending as a United States Senator, is an amazing story of the rise of a pennyless journeyman tailor to the highest political position in the nation, a rise that saw Johnson facing very few political defeats. He showed his political courage many times by taking on unpopular issues in both Tennessee and on the national scene. For example, although East Tennessee was badly in need of transportation facilities, Johnson voted against measures calling for the extension of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad into his section of the state. On the national level, while serving in the House of Representatives, Johnson supported the enactment of a homestead law even though the South in general was opposed to this legislation.

It was during Johnson's service in the House of Representatives that he became identified with the policies and attitudes for which he became best known. These included an unremitting advocacy of the rights of the poor, the laborers, and the mechanics against what he called an overbearing aristocracy. He believed in extreme economy in government, and he was opposed to protective tariffs. Johnson was an uncompromising patriot and also a defender of the institution of slavery and an advocate of white supremacy. The Tennessee politician was an "Old Republican of the Jeffersonian school." Kenneth M. Stampp has referred to Johnson as the "Last Jacksonian."

The Tennessee politician's courage was given its greatest test in 1861, when the sucession movement was in full swing. Johnson was opposed to sucession, believing it to be no remedy for Southern complaints. The Union, Johnson asserted, was perpetual. His strong stand for the Union divided the State of Tennessee. Lifelong supporters turned against Johnson, and old opponents like William G. Brownlow rallied to his side. As the only United States senator to remain loyal from a seceding state, Johnson enjoyed a unique position. He had great influence with the Lincoln administration.

Lincoln selected Johnson to become military governor of Tennessee and later, in 1864, selected him as his running mate on the Union party ticket. Elected vice president, Johnson only served in that capacity for a few weeks. On April 15, after Lincoln's assassination, Johnson became president. With some modifications, Johnson tried to carry out Lincoln's plan of

reconstruction. This put him in opposition to the more radical element of the Republican party that wanted a more harsh peace imposed on the South. This difference of opinion between Johnson and Congress came to a head in 1866, when the Republican party gained control of Congress by more than a two thirds majority. A harsher reconstruction could now be imposed on the ex-Confederate states because Congress could override any veto of reconstruction measures by the president.

It is Trefousse's contention that Johnson was too inflexible in his struggle with Congress—would not accept any compromise—and was finally impeached by the House of Representatives though he was found not quilty of the partisan charges by the Senate. Thus, Johnson's administration was a disaster.

Is this contention valid? Perhaps it is in the opinion of most people today. However, this reviewer has his doubts. Even Trefousse admits that Johnson's political career was a great success until he became president. Then he became a failure because he would not compromise with the Radical Republicans. Why did Johnson refuse to compromise? To quote Trefousse: "The President was determined to frustrate Congressional Reconstruction in order to maintain the Union as he believed the Founding Fathers had designed it and to protect Southern whites from what he considered the horrors of complete social equality." Johnson believed that Radical Reconstruction was unconstitutional; he opposed it, and he lost in the struggle with Congress. He stood up for principles. One can wonder if that made his administration a failure. It certainly did not as far as a majority of Southerners were concerned and as far as a large minority of Southerners were concerned and as far as a large minority of Northerners were concerned. Furthermore, Johnson's conduct of foreign affairs was almost an unqualified success. Two examples will suffice to uphold this contention. He was able to force Napoleon III of France to evacuate Mexico; the puppet monarch, Maximillian, was overthrown, and the Monroe Doctrine was upheld. Furthermore, Johnson was able to purchase Russian America—Alaska—from Russia, an area of land that has been and will continue to be of great importance to this nation for economic reasons and for national security considerations.

Trefousse's *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* is an excellent work, and it does reinforce the conclusion that Johnson's intransigence drove moderate Republicans into supporting the Radicals. However, he has improved but little on Eric L. McKitrick's *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (1960) and in the opinion of this reviewer has not demolished the following works: Howard K. Beale, in *The Critical Years: A Study of Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (1930); Robert W. Winston, in *Andrew Johnson: Plebian and Patriot* (1928); or Milton Lomask, in *Andrew Johnson: President on Trial* (1960). Nevertheless, Trefousse's work is based on a mass of new material that has been made available by the editors of the *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, and it is well worth reading.

Lonnie E. Maness, Ph.D.